UNITED NATIONS
ARMENIA

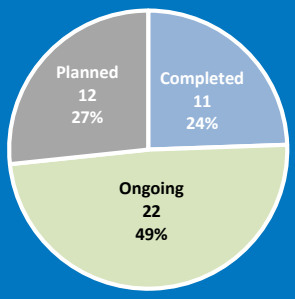
ARMENIA

INTER-AGENCY OPERATIONAL UPDATE

15 November 2020

KEY FIGURES

Humanitarian Response Activities



9,512
And more spontaneous arrivals supported by UN activities

1,500
Covid-19 PPE distributed

8,000
Hygienic items distributed

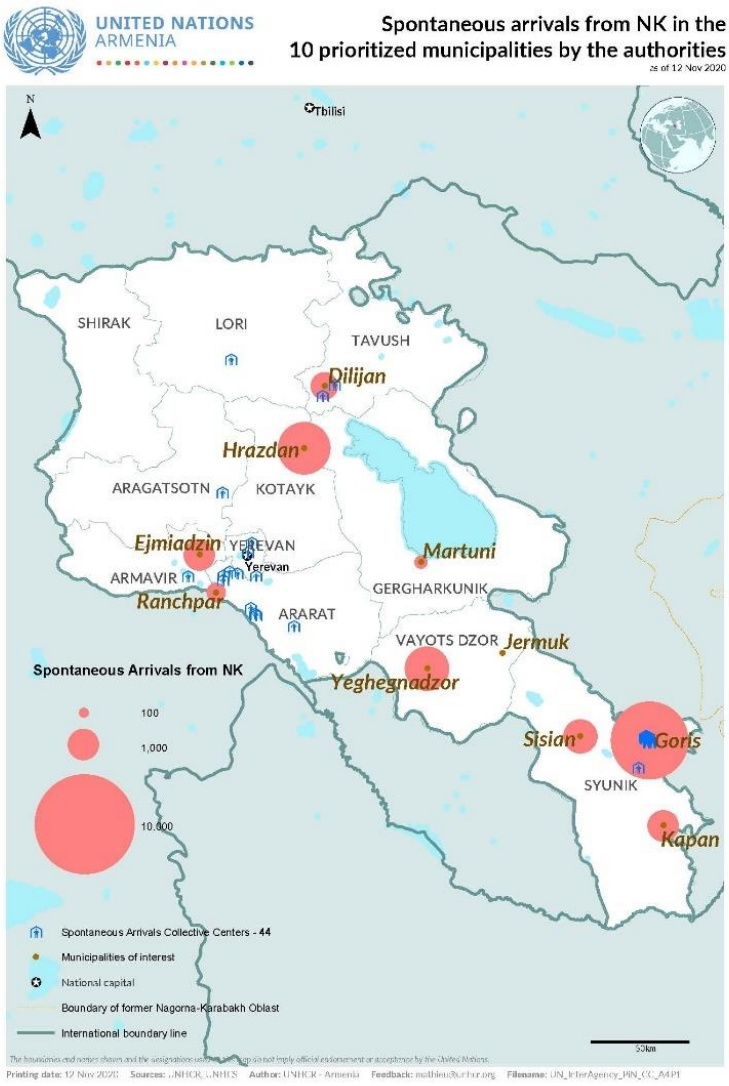
1,400
Bedding items distributed

31,853
additional Core Relief Items will be distributed to spontaneous arrivals

$20,000
Cash ready to support the 10 affected municipalities (selected by the Government)

HIGHLIGHTS

- The UN system in Armenia has put in place a flexible coordination structure under the lead of the Resident Coordinator's Office and UNHCR to coordinate humanitarian efforts in Armenia in response to the crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh. All UN agencies and partners have stepped up their response through the established coordination structure and mobilized technical expertise.
- To date, 15 UN agencies, 4 foundations, 1 international organization, 20 international NGOs, and 19 local NGOs are part of the coordination structure and engage across 5 operational working groups (Shelter and NFI, Protection, Food Security and Nutrition, Health, Early Recovery) and 3 sub-working groups (Child Protection, Education, Cash). Some working groups are completed by a government representative.
- Inter-Agency efforts to meet the needs in the 10 municipalities prioritized by the Government for assistance are underway.



UPDATE ON ACHIEVEMENTS

Operational Context

On 27 September 2020, heavy clashes were reported along the line of contact (LoC) in and around the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, marking the first full-fledged escalation in the region since 2016. Civilian casualties have been reported on both sides of the LoC and beyond, while many houses and public infrastructures in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone, such as schools, roads and communication networks, were also damaged. According to official statements, at least 90,000 individuals have been displaced in and outside of Nagorno-Karabakh as a direct result of the conflict.[1] Following heavy fighting for dominance over the strategic city of Shushi and alleged large movements of civilians away from Shushi and Stepanakert to safety (i.e. territory of Armenia), the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, and the President of the Russian Federation signed a 9-point peace agreement on 9 November. With timelines for territorial exchanges ongoing, it is too soon to predict detailed operational implications but the needs of the spontaneous arrivals remain unchanged, while growing humanitarian needs are reported due to additional recent movement out of NK[2].

Registration of the spontaneous arrivals has so far been carried out by the Government at municipality level but individual data for assistance purposes is not shared at this point. Although no official figures regarding the total displaced population have been available, local authorities in Armenia continue to report a growing number of spontaneous arrivals requiring additional assistance to supplement the limited resources and capacities of the receiving municipalities to host this population.

Most of the spontaneous arrivals are women and children (including unaccompanied and separated children) the majority being hosted with relatives, host families as well as in more precarious conditions living in hotels, old sanatoriums, kindergartens and communal buildings with poor or non-existent heating, water and sanitation facilities. Congested living conditions in both host and communal accommodation, overstretched health system in the regions are contributing to the drastic increase of COVID-19 in many areas. The COVID-19 pandemic and the conflict situation affecting the capacity of the hosting communities to provide sustained support.

Despite small signals for the possibility of gradually opening the space for humanitarian assistance, the Government of Armenia has not approached the UN or any other international actors with a formal request to provide humanitarian assistance to the spontaneous arrivals in Armenia displaced by the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. The central Government has delegated the response to the municipalities. To date, the authorities have prioritized 10 municipalities in Armenia[3] to be approached by the UN agencies to complement the humanitarian response provided by the municipalities to spontaneous arrivals. Following the Government's authorization, UN multi-functional teams have undertaken Rapid Needs Assessments in the 10 municipalities, which provided the base for the subsequent operational response that is ongoing. The most immediate needs identified are in the areas of shelter, non-food items, food, health, education and payment of utilities. Based on the list of prioritized needs provided by the municipalities, UN agencies and partners have responded to needs of approximately 9,512 spontaneous arrivals, notably in the food sector and provision of NFIs.

The fragile socio-economic situation in Armenia predates (e.g. including the impact of COVID-19) but has been further aggravated by the conflict. In addition, and due to heavy damages of civilian infrastructures and continuous uncertainties re. the status of Nagorno-Karabakh as well as the location of the transport corridors, it is likely that the newly arrived individuals will not be able to return to their home in a near future[4], adding pressure on already limited resources in cities

[1] https://www.mfa.am/en/press-releases/2020/10/24/fm_atlantic_council/10585
[2] With the uncertainties following the ceasefire/peace agreement, population movements are observed in both directions, though the MoH expects an additional 45,000 arrivals.
[3] In the North: Dilijan, Ejhmiadzin, Goris, Hrazdan, and Martuni; and in the South: Goris, Jermuk, Kapan, Sisian, Yeghegnadzor.
[4] A Government representative noted that returns are not expected before April/May 2021.

and localities where they have been seeking safety. With the imminent approach of winter, the needs for adequate shelter, NFIs such as winter clothes and shoes, heaters, blankets, hygienic items, including personal protective equipment (PPEs) for COVID-19 prevention, food, access to health services (COVID-19 management, delivery of essential health services, and mental health and psychosocial support), and school materials for children will increase significantly.

Achievements

Shelter and NFIs

Current situation, achievements and impact

- Spontaneous arrivals are mainly hosted with relatives, host families, renting apartments or are accommodated in overcrowded government and public buildings, like kindergartens, social centres, and in some instances sanatoriums, which are located far from the urban centres making access to services (post office, medical facilities, food market etc.) challenging.
- The distribution of core relief items, including beddings items, towels, hygiene supplies and household items, to 10,577 spontaneous arrivals has been completed. The procurement and distribution of additional 31,853 core relief items is underway, including warm clothing for 2,500 individuals and 1,000 electric heaters.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Some communities reported to have reached full capacity in terms of shelter and host families' capacity to accommodate new arrivals due to the overall fragile economic situation in the country. Main challenges include: new arrivals' inability to pay for rent due to lack of income, inability of some host communities and private businesses to pay for increase in utilities, poor condition of rented apartments and government communal buildings (poor or non-existent heating, electricity, water and sanitation facilities).
- Findings of the rapid needs assessments conducted in the 10 municipalities indicate cash-based assistance as the preferred model among families and individuals who have spontaneously arrived to Armenia.[5] A post distribution monitoring survey carried out by UNHCR with 141 households following a COVID-19 related emergency cash assistance program revealed that, when asked about their preferred type of assistance in case of a new program, 82% of beneficiaries stated that they would prefer to receive all assistance in cash.[6] Moreover, this most cost-effective response measure would address individual needs in a dignified manner, but also provide for the freedom of choice of beneficiaries, contributing to economic recovery and leading to reduced social exclusion. Beneficiaries would be able to address a diverse variety of emergency needs, enabling food security, covering rent, utilities and ensuring access to other essential items and services, such as hygiene supplies, health (e.g. medicine) and transportation, that cannot be effectively covered through in-kind distributions (only). Considering also the COVID-19 situation in the country, cash transfers offer opportunities to limit transmission (and thus mitigate health risks and concerns), as opposed to the in-kind support, which inevitably involves frequent and direct human contact.
- Winterization: Winter is imminent and spontaneous arrivals already suffer from lack of heating and appropriate winter clothing and shoes, as many have either lost or left all their belongings in Nagorno-Karabakh. COVID related and economic strains also affect host communities.
- **Identified priority needs:**
    - adequate accommodation facilities to absorb influx of new spontaneous arrivals from Nagorno-Karabakh;
    - means to cover rental and utility costs;

[5] The Government of Armenia has so far not allowed humanitarian cash transfers as a form of assistance provided to spontaneous arrivals from NK, however, active preparedness work has been undertaken by the Cash sub-working group.
[6] UNHCR survey results: 82% of beneficiaries stated that they would prefer to receive all assistance in cash, 19% stated that they would prefer a combination of cash and in-kind items, and only 1% indicated that they would prefer to receive only in-kind items.

- winter clothing and shoes, cooking stoves, hygiene supplies and dignity kits, diapers (for children and the elderly), electric heaters, bedding supplies;
- additional municipal capacities for storage and distribution of NFIs;
- trained staff/volunteers to implement effective and efficient distribution of NFIs.

- **Recommended actions:**
  - mapping and urgent repair of rented apartments and government/public buildings to improve their condition and prepare for winter;
  - introduction of cash-based interventions to spontaneous arrivals and affected families in Armenia through strong partnership with the Government and in alignment with the national social protection system to ensure their ability to cover rental, utility costs and other basic costs, in light of their lack of income, vulnerability and the limited capacity of host families to continuously accommodate the new arrivals, the decreasing capacity of the affected municipalities, challenged by the overall fragile economic situation in the country;
  - purchase and distribution of most urgently required non-food items, including winter clothes/shoes, heaters, blankets as preparation for winter.

Protection

Current situation, achievements and impact

- Access to information on the composition and profile of the newly arrived individuals is of crucial importance for effective and efficient identification of the most vulnerable (unaccompanied/separated children, elderly persons without support, persons with disabilities, etc.) and to inform a targeted response. In the absence of access to Government data, UN agencies and partners have conducted rapid needs assessments in the 10 municipalities prioritized by the Government to assess the vulnerability profile of the spontaneous arrivals. Based on the findings of the RNA, new arrivals consist predominantly of women, children, including some unaccompanied and separated children, and elderly persons. The registration of new arrivals is conducted by the municipalities but referral systems to the Police for timely issuance of documentation, which allows access to basic rights and services, have not yet been put in place.
- Eight unaccompanied/separated children have been identified by the local partner, Children Support Center Foundation, and were provided with emergency foster care and support; in six cases, children were successfully reunited with their parent or close family member.
- 100 persons were provided with legal counselling on documentation by the local partner Mission Armenia and obtained new passports in Armenia.
- Baseline research is being finalized in the framework of the Protection Working Group to analyze the current legislation and practice on legal status and access to rights and services for persons who arrived from the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone to inform further protection interventions.
- UNHCR is piloting a Protection Monitoring system in the 10 municipalities prioritized by the Government that was developed in consultation with partner agencies. The final tool will be used by members of the Protection WG for comprehensive and regular collection of data on protection needs of persons who arrived from the NK conflict zone.
- UNICEF, in partnership with local NGOs and in coordination with MoLSA is providing mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) to the most affected and vulnerable children, adolescents, and parents (mainly women) in Syunik, Gegharkunik, Vayots Dzor, Kotayk, Aragatsotn and Tavush regions. In addition, UNICEF is working with local NGOs to enhance the capacity of local state and NGO social service workforce professionals in responding to the MHPSS needs.

Education

- Access to education is limited, despite the fact that the Ministry of Education promotes attendance of displaced children in schools close to the collective centres, free of charge. The majority of displaced children do not attend classes for various reasons: stress, trauma, lack of school items and clothes, as well as language/dialect barriers.[7] Families also hesitate to enroll children in school due to the uncertainty regarding the length of their stay.
- UNICEF and partners are working with the Government and the 10 municipalities to identify children among the spontaneous arrivals from the Nagorno-Karabakh region and support their inclusion in the host community schools or distance learning programs offered by the MoESCS' National Center for Education Technologies.
- UNICEF started the distribution of 5,000 school kits, consisting of a school bag with basic learning supplies and hygienic items, in the 10 municipalities; around 1,500 kits have already been delivered.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Tracing of missing family member for unaccompanied and separated children, proper documentation and guardianship are key protection considerations.
- As the number of arrivals, including children, continues to raise, there is an increased need for basic education supplies, including learning supplies. Children with special educational needs and disabilities are in need of specialized support for integration into education. UNICEF has partnered with an NGO run by parents of children with disability to provide emergency support and recovery services for children with severe and moderate disabilities in need of specialized assistance.
- Identified needs in the area of education:
  - inclusion of children of spontaneous arrivals in host community schools;
  - special education, rehabilitation and therapeutic support for children with special educational needs and children with disabilities;
  - early childhood development services in collective shelters;
  - recreation and after school services.
- **Recommended action:**
  - provision of mental health and psychosocial support and assistance, including through child-friendly spaces;
  - distribution of educational materials, school items and IT equipment (for distance learning purposes);
  - organization of pre-school education and extracurricular activities to ensure meaningful time for children;
  - establishment of temporary learning spaces in the shelters;
  - assessment, certification and service provision for children with special education needs and for children with disabilities;
  - securing of regular transportation of children who are accommodated in remote resort areas to schools to ensure regular attendance;
  - establishment of proper referral mechanism to the police is required for timely issuance of documentation.

[7] Primary schools reopened for face-to-face learning, while secondary schools changed to distant learning as of 13 November related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Food Security and Nutrition

Current situation, achievements and impact

- Findings of a Food Security and Vulnerability Assessment conducted by WFP in 2020 before the war in NK demonstrate, that 15.3 percent[8] of the Armenian population are food insecure, and according to the official statistics almost a quarter of the population live in poverty.[9] In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated food insecurity by disrupting access to livelihoods, and created challenges for food systems by affecting local supply and demand. Respondents to WFP's Food Security and Vulnerability Assessment reported that around 45% had faced temporary interruptions in their jobs, and 20% have permanently lost their jobs. Increasing numbers of spontaneous arrivals from Nagorno-Karabakh has increased need food assistance support, and this exacerbates existing food insecurity in the community.
- In the first two weeks of November, Food Security and Nutrition Working Group members report targeting 24,500 people of concern across the Republic of Armenia with food assistance. As of 11 November, 16,145 people have been reached. Amongst those targeted were spontaneous arrivals, people moving within Armenia, and hosting communities.
- WFP complemented nationally coordinated food assistance efforts by providing part of the food rations/baskets (wheat flour, lentils, oil, salt, and canned fish/meat) for 8,000 spontaneous arrivals in Syunik and 3,000 spontaneous arrivals in Vayots Dzor.
- World Vision International has targeted 11,500 individuals in provinces across Armenia with food assistance, and at the time of reporting has reached 4,116 individuals. Those targeted include spontaneous arrivals, populations moving within Armenia, and hosting communities.
- The Food Security and Nutrition Working Group has supported its members to meet minimum humanitarian standards by hosting information sessions on protection mainstreaming, organizing COVID-19 safe distributions, calculation of the nutritional value of a food basket, and developing SOPs on the distribution of Breast Milk Substitutes to ensure compliance by all members.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Food assistance is identified as a priority need for spontaneous arrivals. Markets have demonstrated that, so far, they can absorb increased levels of demand and there is no shortage of food items in the market, but those in need might lack the purchasing power to access the market. If livelihoods continue to be affected by the Covid-19 pandemic this access could be further exacerbated.
- **Recommended action:**
    - In addition to ongoing and increased general food assistance, the introduction of cash-based assistance for the spontaneous arrivals and others eligible to food assistance is recommended to effectively meet the increasing needs and in view of their dwindling ability to purchase food due to lack of income. Ongoing market assessments are recommended at both national and community level to ensure markets remain able to respond to increases in demand.

[8] Comprehensive Food Security, Vulnerability Analysis updates 2019.
[9] Statistical Committee of the RA, Social Snapshot and Poverty in Armenia, 2019.

Health

Current situation, achievements and impact

- The Ministry of Health (MoH) is the sole provider of health services to the spontaneous arrivals. Primary health services are free of charge for spontaneous arrivals as for citizens of Armenia.[10] In addition, persons with category one disabilities among spontaneous arrivals receive the same benefits as the citizens of Armenia. Spontaneous arrivals can visit primary health facilities in the area of their temporary residence and are enrolled immediately without any special registration procedures. Health facilities are assigned additional budgets to ensure health services provision for the spontaneous arrivals.[11]
- The RNA showed that spontaneous arrivals are unaware of medical/healthcare services available in the area in which they are accommodated. Some communities proactively reach out to new arrivals and refer them to respective municipality for support, as well as for registration purposes.
- COVID-19 cases are on the rise in Armenia as it is the case globally. While the prevalence of COVID-19 among spontaneous arrivals has not been calculated separately, positive COVID-19 cases among spontaneous arrivals are listed in Armenian database as it is for the Armenian citizens and case management is done in similar fashion. However, with the poor observation of public health and social measures and overcrowding among the spontaneous arrivals, the rate of infection is expected to rise.
- MoH has requested WHO for Emergency Medical Teams (EMT) and provision of supplies, which includes medicines for non-communicable diseases, medical supplies and surgical instruments and trauma kits. WHO EMT secretariat has sent out a Request for Assistance for Armenia through its channels and is expecting arrival of EMTs to Armenia in the near future.
- **Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps:**
  - medical equipment and medicines for COVID-19 management and patients with chronic diseases;
  - provision of mental health and psychosocial support;
  - PPEs and hygiene items.
- **Recommended action in support of needs of population:**
  - strengthening the dissemination of relevant information regarding access to health services for spontaneous arrivals;
  - coordination of distribution of PPEs/hygiene items, as well as sensitization of affected population through provision of adequate information on the importance and proper use of PPEs;
  - provision of mental health and psychosocial support services.
- **Recommended action in support of Ministry of Health:**
  - support for COVID-19 diagnosis, surveillance and case management which includes supplies (diagnostic kits, medical equipment, oxygen concentrators, ventilators etc.), staff (surveillance staff for contact tracing and follow up; nurses, doctors etc.), space (additional beds in regular wards and ICU for COVID-19 management);
  - support for continuity of essential health services like medications for non-communicable diseases.

[10] Based on decision 318-N by the Minister of Health.
[11] Decision 642-N allows dedication of additional funds to primary health facilities based on the number of covered populations.

Early Recovery

In addition to the four thematic humanitarian Working Groups – Shelter and NFIs, Protection, Food Security and Nutrition, and Health – a fifth Working Group on Early Recovery has been established to allow mainstreaming of longer-term initiatives to strengthen communities' resilience in Armenia and to contribute towards building an early recovery platform.

Current situation, achievements and Impact

- Host communities' service delivery and utility payment capacities have been impacted by the arrival of displaced individuals from NK. Accommodation in private housing and public facilities has posed additional challenges for the communities, such as accommodation conditions, increased utility bills and sustainability of the accommodation arrangements. A surge in COVID-19 cases brought additional complications in terms of awareness raising and management.
- Unemployment and limited access to benefits (especially for informal workers), linked to COVID-19 and the escalation of the conflict, are pressing livelihood issues, while the capacity of the local economy to provide active engagement for spontaneous arrivals in the host communities is reported as limited. Economic and agriculture activities in a number of communities, particularly the ones in border regions, have been affected.
- UNDP is rolling out support to the affected communities in several ways, including provision of imminent energy saving solutions that generate savings intended for covering utility bills, basic renovation and repairs of host public facilities, and supporting communities to find alternative ways to safeguard their economic and agriculture activities. UNDP and members of the Early Recovery WG are collaborating with the lead agencies of the thematic humanitarian working groups. As such, UNDP collaborated with the Shelter/NFI WG in the provision of 1,200 bedding items for spontaneous arrivals, which can, later on, be repurposed for other needs under the auspices of the MoLSA.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- capacity to cover the increasing utility bills;
- capacity to cover the increased service needs, including management of COVID-19 related issues;
- lack of livelihood and employment opportunities;
- early warning and disaster risk management capacities.
- **Recommended action:**
    - Initiatives aimed at local economic development, building local resilience and preparedness for crises are recommended. In the shorter run, the most pressing issues, such as energy and evident increase of utility bills in the municipalities need to be addressed in continuity.
    - Spontaneous arrivals should be provided with access to active measures for their socio-economic engagement and income-generating activities to ensure a dignified stay in the host communities.
    - Boosting of service delivery capacities, including special lens on COVID-19 and its impact.

Working in partnership

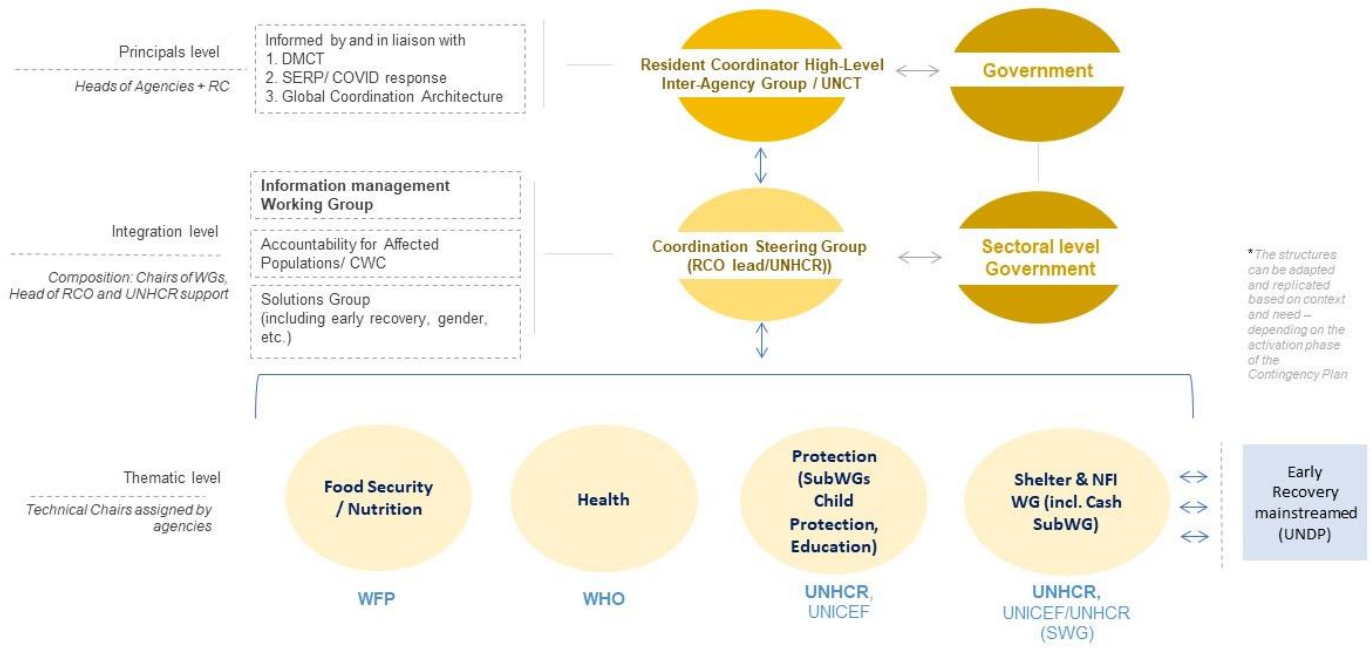
While no formal humanitarian assistance framework has been put in place given the absence of a Government request to do so, the UN team in Armenia has established a flexible coordination structure, which, at the technical level, is centred around four main humanitarian Working Groups (WG) – Shelter and NFIs, Protection, Food Security and Nutrition, and Health – as well as a fifth Working Group on Early Recovery allowing mainstreaming of longer-term initiatives to strengthen communities in Armenia. Additional Sub-Working Groups have been established in the area of Child Protection, Education, and humanitarian cash transfer programming. The cross-cutting issue of mental health and psychosocial support is included in the work of both, the Protection and Health WG. These technical Working Groups form the backbone of the coordination of the humanitarian response and serve to mobilize and strengthen coordination and collaboration among the different UN agencies, international organizations, local and international NGOs with the ultimate goal to ensure provision of most efficient, swift and cost-effective humanitarian response to challenges generated by the current conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. To date, 15 UN agencies, 4 foundations, 1 International Organization, 20 international and 19 local NGOs are part of the coordination system.

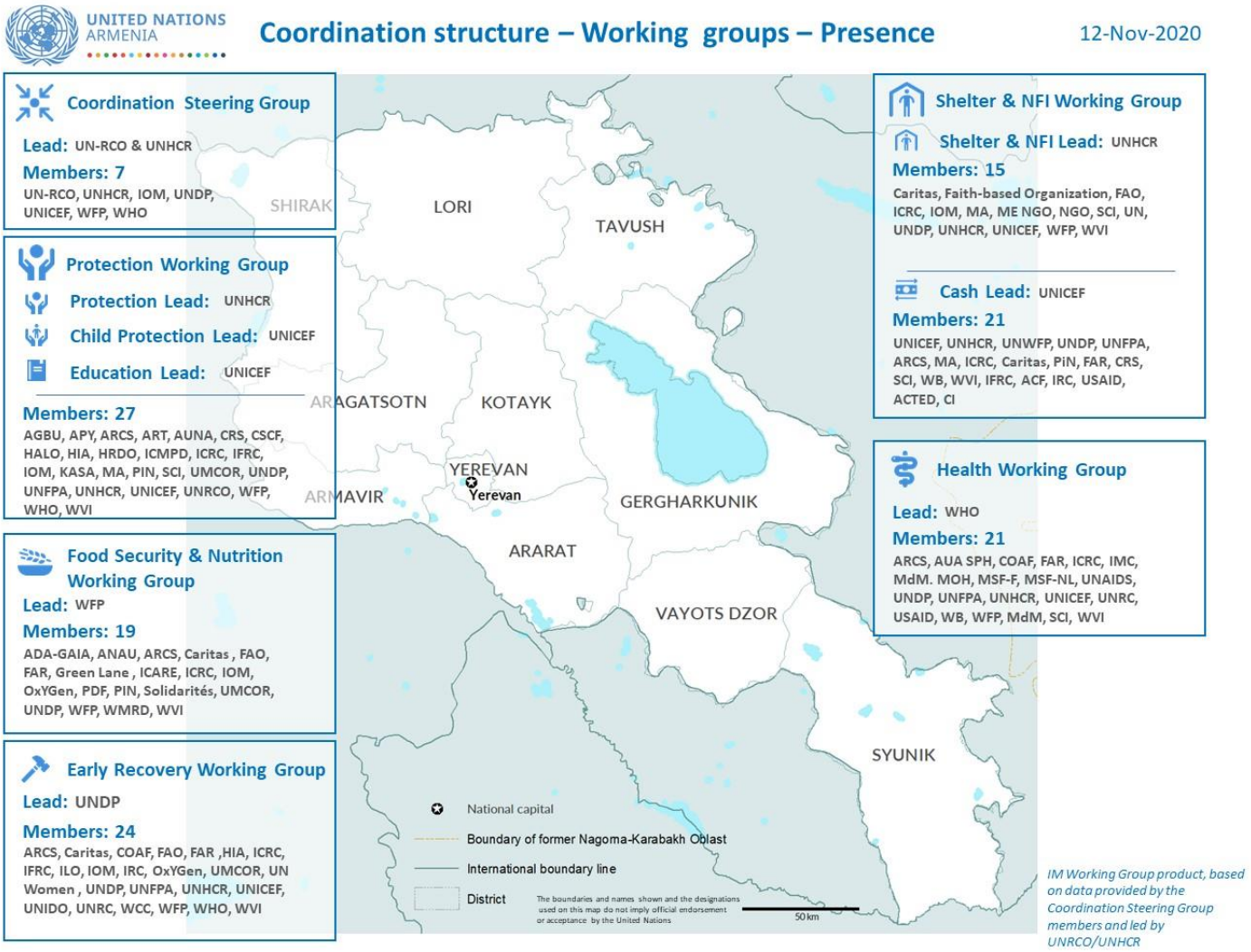
At the integration level, interagency coordination is ensured through the Coordination Steering Group (CSG), which is comprised of chairs of the activated WGs and lead by the UN Resident Coordinator's Office and UNHCR. The CSG is supported by an Information Management WG to ensure a harmonized approach among agencies and partners in collecting information on activities and to facilitate data and information gathering as well as dissemination. At the Principals level, the coordination structure brings together the Resident Coordinator and Heads of UN Agencies to ensure overall alignment and clear guidance of the humanitarian response.

The proposed coordination model has been communicated to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as to all relevant stakeholders. As it is currently pending endorsement by the Government, it is implemented on a 'no objection' basis. The structure of this scalable model can be adapted based on changes in conflict context and needs. The UN system in Armenia would welcome a deeper engagement and exchange with the Government and key sectoral line Ministries to explore ways for planning and extending humanitarian assistance in an acceptable format and with maximum efficiency.

Given the fluidity of the crisis, the coordination modalities will be reviewed continuously and adjusted according to the evolving situation on the ground, in full respect of globally established mandated roles and responsibilities.

Coordination Approach





FINANCIAL INFORMATION

The UN team in Armenia stands ready to continue and expand its operation and assistance provided at municipality level to vulnerable populations in the country and to launch a system-wide humanitarian funding appeal to this end, pending the Government's approval to do so.

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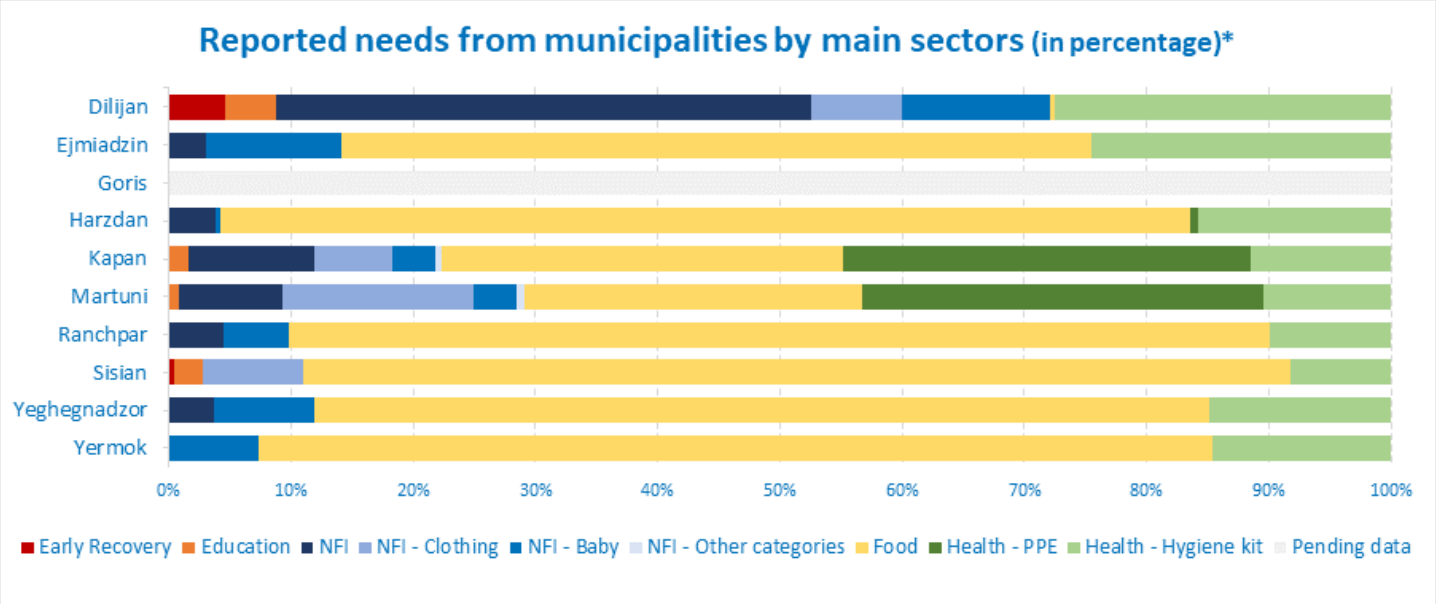
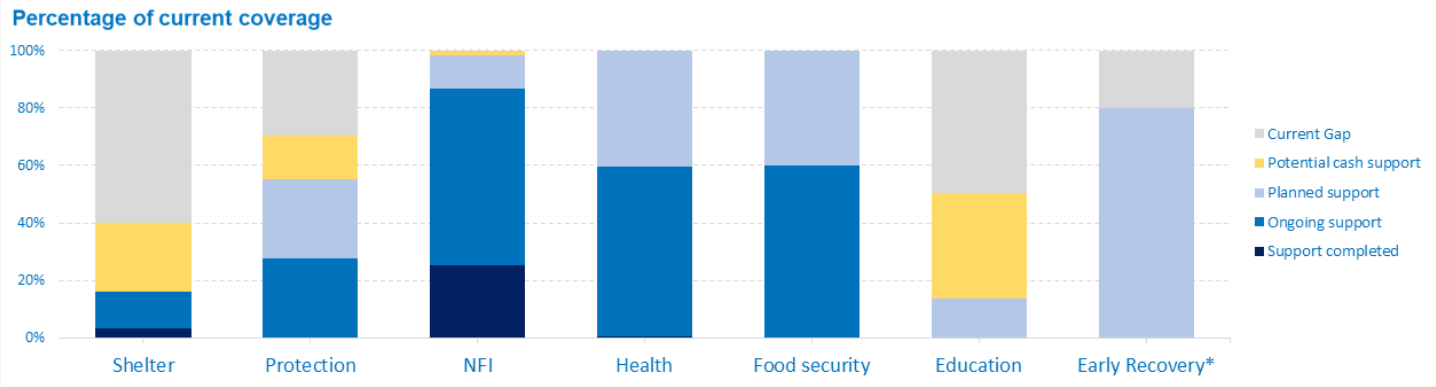
ANNEXES

Reported needs from assisted municipalities by sector*



*as of 23 October 2020

Primary response by sector*



*as of 5 November 2020